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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 000860

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHSA](#) [ETRD](#) [EWWT](#) [XD](#) [XO](#) [IN](#) [NSSP](#)

SUBJECT: INDIAN INTEREST, AND HESITATION, ABOUT MARITIME SECURITY INITIATIVES

Classified By: DCM Robert O. Blake, Jr., for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

1. (C) Summary: Despite skepticism from some strategic commentators, the Indian government continues to express interest in the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) and other maritime security programs, but will not join PSI unless the matter of the Core Group is resolved. In the latest signal of GOI support for PSI principles, MOD Mukherjee flagged PSI as a necessary response to the threat of global proliferation networks. On a related issue, negotiations on Indian participation in the Container Security Initiative (CSI) are at an advanced stage, with a delegation scheduled to travel to Washington later in February to formalize GOI involvement. CSI may be a useful stepping-stone toward engaging with India on maritime security issues, but we will not get India off the fence on PSI until we clarify the status of Indian membership in the Core Group. End Summary.

Continued Interest -- and Questions -- about PSI  
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2. (U) In the most positive indication to date that the GOI is interested in expanding its maritime security engagement with the US, DefMin Pranab Mukherjee on January 29 stressed the need for a multilateral mechanism to tackle the threat of WMD proliferation. In comments at a major Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses' (IDSA) conference, Mukherjee recalled that India had interdicted a North Korean ship carrying missile components in 1999, and how the intercept of a ship carrying uranium enrichment equipment to Libya eventually led to the unraveling of the AQ Khan network. "The anxiety is that these instances could well be the tip of the iceberg," he warned. "Some initiatives such as the PSI have been mooted. These need to be examined in greater detail. The underlying need for a consensual multilateral effort cannot be denied," the DefMin concluded.

3. (C) In a recent meeting with PolCouns and Pol-MilOff, MEA Additional Secretary (International Security) Meera Shankar reiterated GOI interest in joining PSI, but not in contravention of maritime conventions and not as a "junior partner." According to Shankar, the GOI will not consider participating in PSI until there is clarification on the status of the Core Group, i.e., whether India will be admitted to the Core Group or whether the Core Group is disbanded altogether. "We recognize a convergence of objectives on PSI: maritime security, preventing proliferation to non-state actors," she said, "but we can't accept discriminatory membership or contravening international law."

Skeptics Weigh In  
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4. (C) The GOI's conditional interest in collaborating with the US on maritime security programs such as PSI, the Container Security Initiative (CSI), and the nascent Regional Maritime Security Initiative (RMSI) contrasts with strategists' skepticism about these initiatives. In a January 31 article for the influential Delhi-based Observer Research Foundation (ORF), Vijay Sakhujia noted that some Asian nations have reacted differently to these initiatives, reflecting concerns about their status vis-a-vis UNCLOS, the legality of consequent interdictions, impact on trade, sovereignty, and about a growing US presence in Asian waters. "Although there is broad convergence on issues of common security concerns (which) may even provide the impetus to bring the Indian and US navies closer, India must be conscious about regional security concerns and not get muddled in American strategic moves in the region, particularly with regard to PSI and RMSI," he cautioned. He went on, however, to encourage support for CSI, to the extent that it enables greater trade with the US.

5. (U) Prominent "Hindu" foreign affairs commentator Siddharth Varadarajan has also pointed out that PSI does not distinguish between WMD and missiles. "The US may have accepted India's de facto nuclear status, but it remains a vocal critic of the country's missile program. Unless India's own missile status is formally accepted, it will be difficult for New Delhi to participate in the aggressive pursuit of international ships suspected of carrying missile parts," he argued.

## Repositioning India as a Nonproliferation Partner

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16. (U) Countering these critics, JNU Professor and frequent Indo-US commentator Dr. C. Raja Mohan has argued that participation in PSI and CSI may be an opportunity for India to reposition itself as part of the global nonproliferation solution. According to Mohan, PM Manmohan Singh wants India to "negotiate purposefully on the terms under which it could join the new global nonproliferation initiatives, including PSI and CSI." "Getting on board the new global non-proliferation arrangements should, therefore, be at the top of India's diplomatic agenda. Meanwhile the Indian nuclear discourse must...focus on the new acronyms like the CSI and PSI, where the real action is," he concluded.

### CSI as a Stepping Stone

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17. (U) On February 1, "The Economic Times" reported that the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) has decided to join the Container Security Initiative (CSI) and a high-level meeting of MEA, port, and customs officials will meet in New Delhi on February 4 to finalize terms and conditions. A GOI delegation is expected to travel to Washington later in February to formalize Indian participation. In a February 2 conversation with PolCouns, MEA J/S (Americas) S. Jaishankar expressed satisfaction with progress on CSI, but also cautioned that MEA would need to deal with inevitable Parliamentary questions about a "give away" of Indian sovereignty. In this context, he added, it would be important for India to negotiate a reciprocal CSI agreement that allows the GOI to say its undertakings with Washington are mirrored in Indian rights vis-a-vis US commerce.

### Comment

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18. (C) India's CSI interest is a useful stepping-stone toward greater engagement on maritime security. We find GOI concern about the possible conflict between PSI and international maritime conventions something of a red herring, given the extent to which other major maritime trade nations have already considered and disposed of this issue -- and expect the same to happen here when the matter is treated at the political level. The key to getting India off the fence on PSI remains clarifying the status of Indian membership in the Core Group. If we can resolve that, we will be pushing on an open door to enlist India as a partner in our global counterproliferation efforts.

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